

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

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SUBJECT: FALSE RUMORS REPORTED AS NEWS

REF: A. STATE 060733

B. SAIGON 3119

1. DEPARTMENT SHOULD TREAT WITH CONSIDERABLE SKEPTICISM WIRE SERVICE AND NETWORK NEWS REPORTS ORIGINATING IN SAIGON ON THE CURRENT MILITARY SITUATION. WILD SPECULATION AND RUMORS CAN BE PICKED UP ON VIRTUALLY EVERY STREET CORNER, MANY OF WHICH ARE UNDOUBTEDLY FLOATED BY COMMUNIST OR OPPOSITIONIST SOURCES TO CREATE DOUBT AND CONFUSION.

2. SOME WIRE SERVICES AND NETWORKS ARE REPORTING THESE RUMORS AS HARD NEWS, USUALLY OBTAINING THE STORIES FROM UNIDENTIFIED MIDDLE LEVEL GVN SOURCES.

3. THE LATEST FANCIFUL STORY REPORTED ON MARCH 20 BY CBS, AND PROBABLY OTHER NETWORKS, TOLD OF NVA TANKS ENTERING QUANG TRI PROVINCE WITH HEADLIGHTS BLAZING TO LIGHT THE PATHS OF RETREATING GVN SOLDIERS. THIS STORY, WHICH WAS NO MORE THAN STREET RUMOR, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WAS OBVIOUSLY PLANTED TO UNDERMINE THE PEOPLE'S FAITH IN THE

ARMY'S WILL TO RESIST. OFFICIAL AUTHENTICATED MILITARY REPORTS SHOW THAT THE NVA TANKS ENTERED QUANG TRI PROVINCE IN BROAD DAYLIGHT, AND THAT AFTER SOME INITIAL CONFUSION AMONG TERRITORIAL FORCES, THE TANKS WERE SUCCESSFULLY BLOCKED BY SVN MARINES.

4. SUCH RUMOR-BASED STORIES, REPORTED AS FACTUAL NEWS, PAINT AN ALARMIST PICTURE OF THE ADMITTEDLY SERIOUS MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM. FOR EXAMPLE, THE BELGIAN AMBASSADOR AND THE DUTCH CHARGE D'AFFAIRES TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER THURSDAY THEY WERE APPALLED TO HEAR FROM VARIOUS NEWS SOURCES, THAT, THE GVN HAD DECIDED TO ABANDON HUE. THIS AND OTHER UNTRUE REPORTS WHICH APPEARED TO BE WELL SOURCED HAD GIVEN THEM THE IMPRESSION THAT SOUTH VIETNAM WAS FALLING APART.

5. SUGGEST THAT WHEN QUERIED ABOUT SENSATIONAL STORIES FILED FROM SAIGON THE PRESS CORPS SHOULD BE REMINDED THAT WILD RUMORS ABOUND HERE AS A RESULT OF THE NORTH VIETNAMESE OFFENSIVE AND SHOULD BE TREATED WITH EXTREME SKEPTICISM.

6. VOA SHOULD BE PARTICULARLY ALERT TO STORIES PLUCKED FROM THE SAIGON RUMOR MILL AND CAREFULLY CHECK ALL QUESTIONABLE ITEMS BEFORE BROADCASTING THEM, AND CONTINUE TO CROSS CHECK WITH VOA SAIGON CORRESPONDENT.

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